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Boozman Bulletin: Time to Change Course

Once again, a good portion of the state is covered in ice and snow and the air is bitterly cold. It feels like it has been this way for a better part of the season, which is why we're all ready to kick winter to the curb and see the temperatures warm up. Unfortunately, Punxsutawney Phil predicts this winter weather will linger on a few more weeks.

In the movie "Groundhog Day" Bill Murray's character travels to Punxsutawney, PA only to find himself reliving February 2nd over and over. He quickly learns that he can get away with anything and throws caution to the wind only to find himself waking up in the same bed, to the same song. It's not until he reflects on what's important and reexamines his priorities that his life changes and he sees February 3rd.

While I was sitting in the House Chamber, watching the President deliver his State of the Union address, I couldn't help but think of this movie. During the annual speech, [President Obama pitched many of the same recycled ideas that have left our country in a stalled economic recovery](#). As President Obama has done throughout his presidency, he made his intentions clear that he wants to continue on this path with or without Congress. Like the cold weather, the President's ideas have outstayed their welcome.

We also experience a similar sense of déjà vu having relived the same tired approach to funding federal programs and spending taxpayer dollars by regularly passing continuing resolutions to keep the government operating. While Arkansans and the American people demand that we rein in federal spending, Congress continued this short-term funding mechanism that fails to deal with the long-term spending problem our country faces.

One important tool to help curb runaway spending is [getting back to regular order. This means approving the 12 appropriations bills](#) that fund all the functions and services of the federal government. Fortunately, Congress has made this a priority and is getting back on the right track.

This is an important step to reducing government spending. Determining how we distribute

taxpayer dollars is a basic responsibility of Congress that for too long has been put in the hands of the White House instead of the House and Senate where it belongs. Arkansans have seen President Obama's spending priorities and understand that they are at odds with their interests and values. The recent budget deal and omnibus that Congress approved put us on a path toward doing things in an open, transparent and thoughtful way.

Quick Takes:

- **Time to Quit Stalling Keystone:** Instead of accelerating the approval process for the Keystone XL Pipeline, President Obama has been reviewing the permit for almost as long as he has been in office. He is literally trying to study the project to death. Despite the President's unwillingness to help, [progress is being made](#).
- **Sharing Health Care Stories:** Every day I hear from Arkansans about how Obamacare is negatively impacting their bottom line and how they're not getting what they were promised. [I'm sharing some of those stories on the Senate floor](#) in an effort to show why this law needs to be repealed and replaced.
- **Farm Bill:** Widespread support from Members of Congress helped provide certainty for our farmers, ranchers and agriculture producers with the [passage of a five-year Farm Bill](#). This legislation provides an [equitable safety net for our nation's agriculture producers](#), makes significant policy reforms and achieves major savings toward deficit reduction. It's on the way to the President's desk to be signed into law.
- **Fighting Overregulation of Family Farms:** Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) [pledged to clarify its policies relating to regulating activities on small farms](#) after a number of my colleagues and I demanded the agency immediately stop its unlawful targeting of family farms.
- **Jobs Report:** The most recent jobs report shows that the final weeks of 2014 was the weakest month of hiring in three years. [These figures prove](#) that Congress needs to focus on the economy and approve policies that encourage businesses to hire.
- **Protecting Military Retiree Pensions:** Late last year Congress passed, against my objections, the Bipartisan Budget Act. I voted against it because it increases spending with the promise of future cuts and offsets spending by reducing the cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) for retired servicemembers under the age of 62. We took steps to restore these benefits in the omnibus and I'm working with my colleagues to make sure our servicemembers receive the benefits they earned. [In a letter to the Armed Service Committee Leadership in the House and Senate I](#)

[wrote](#) “I see this as the equivalent of reaching into these individuals’ retirement accounts and taking that money from them, which is unconscionable” and [on the Senate floor I urged immediate action](#) to correct this grave injustice that was made.

- **Desert Shield and Desert Storm Memorial:** January 16, 2014 marked the 23rd anniversary of Operation Desert Storm. The men and women who sacrificed their lives during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield deserve a memorial in their honor. That’s why Sen. Joe Donnelly (R-IN) and I introduced legislation to [create of a national memorial to commemorate the service of these men and women](#).
- **Arkansas State ROTC:** The Army clarified its criteria on its ROTC program evaluation. You may remember last year that the Army proposed to cut the A-State ROTC program but the Arkansas delegation fought to maintain it. Last week the [Army announced its criteria for evaluating ROTC programs](#) as it reviews programs nationwide. This is good news for A-State as we tell the story of how it’s an asset to the Army.
- **Critical Habitat:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS) proposed 42% of Arkansas as critical habitat designation for the Neosho Mucket and Rabbitsfoot mussels. The Arkansas Congressional Delegation and several public and private sector organizations in the state have objected. The delegation [sent a letter to FWS asking how that decision was made and for the agency to reevaluate](#) the scope of the critical habitat designation.
- **National School Choice Week:** The Department of Education imposes a one-size-fits-all approach to education throughout the country. I believe education decisions need to be made by parents, teachers, and community leaders at the state and local level—not Washington. This is why I was happy to support [National School Choice Week](#).
- **Arkansas Week:** At the end of 2013 we joined Arkansas Week’s Steve Barnes to discuss a wide range of issues from the Farm Bill to the budget to Obamacare. If you missed the interview you can [watch it here](#).
- **Senate Youth Program:** Congratulations to Abhilasha Gokulan of Little Rock and Adam Williams of Jonesboro on being [selected as Arkansas’s delegates to the United States Senate Youth Program](#). This program brings together some of our nation’s top youth leaders who show a commitment to public service. Abhilasha and Adam will spend a week Washington, D.C. meeting and interacting with lawmakers, appointed officials and staff who are involved in crafting legislation and making decisions that influence our laws.
- **Tele-Town Hall:** We’ll continue hosting telephone town halls, a convenient way to have an open dialogue about some of the issues Arkansans are concerned with.

We take your calls and want to hear from you. If you want to participate in our next discussion [sign up here](#).



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